

# Simonson under attack for remarks on rape

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and  
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Angry feminists confronted County Judge Archie Simonson this morning and immediately afterward began planning to remove him from the bench through recall or disbarment proceedings.

Simonson is under heavy fire from throughout the community for remarks he made Wednesday about rape. The media and women's groups report being besieged with phone calls protesting the comments, and City-County Building employees this morning talked of little else.

Simonson declined to go down to watch about 60 demonstrators in front of the building who were calling for his resignation, so several women — and a large press corps — trooped into his office and demanded an explanation.

The judge insisted he had not meant to say, as reported, that rape was a "normal reaction" to "sexual provocations," but he did not convince the women, who branded his views "sexist," "appalling," and "demeaning to women."

Janet Heisse, representing the Rape Crisis Center and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, said such attitudes as his "put women in an extremely dangerous position" by appearing to justify rape, and discourage rape victims from attempting prosecution.

"We have great fear that we will not be able to get justice in the judicial system," she said.

After the meeting, the women immediately began making plans to research various methods of removing a judge from office, since he had told them bluntly he would not resign. Also, a letter-writing campaign is being organized to protest Simonson's comments.

Said Dolores Grengg of WILPF, "The frightening thing is that he doesn't understand the gut issue — that rape is a crime of violence and not of passion."

Simonson sentenced a 15-year-old boy who admitted participating in the Nov. 8 group rape of a 16-year-old West High School girl to a year at

home under court supervision.

In doing so, Simonson commented that sexual assaults are understandable given Madison's "sexually permissive" attitude.

In a telephone call this morning, Simonson repeated his opinions about the permissive society, but emphasized that he did not mean to apply them specifically to the case at hand. "I was speaking in generalities," he said.

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"In the adult world there is sexual permissiveness and provocation," he said today. "We have sex shows and movies, nude bars and taverns. Even the mode of dress is provocative. The nudity you see up and down State Street these days, in past times you

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Staff photo by David Sandell

Even temperatures in the 80s did not deter this protester in a long, heavy trench coat. Her friend in a bikini appeared more comfortable. Their point was that women should be free to wear what they want without fearing rape.



# Simonson

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would have had to spend a lot of money to see in Chicago.

"Even in court people wear see-through blouses and no bra and tight clothes."

Juveniles may have a hard time dealing with the sexual attitudes of the adult world, Simonson added. "It's just normal for a 15-year-old boy to respond normally to sexual provocations. I don't know how they can suppress their sexual responses. It's difficult to imagine the provocation of youth."

He said the sexual attitude of society does not justify sexual assault, "but it may be some of the reason why sexual assaults are committed."

Simonson said that reducing sexual provocation, possibly including women's mode of dress, might reduce the amount of sexual assault. "Maybe a greater effort should be made to control our sexual attitudes. Maybe provocative dress should be included in that."

The Judge said that, although sexual assault cannot be excused, the court must take into consideration the circumstances. "It is possible that under some circumstances I might look upon the mode of dress as being provocative," he commented.

He added that there may be a problem enforcing the new sexual assault laws that define sexual assaults as other sexual aggression short of rape.

He said, however, that a woman should have no fear of appearing before him on a sexual assault cases, citing his court record.

The Madison chapter of the National Organization of Women does not agree and has called for his resignation. "Simonson's usefulness is over as far as his continued judgeship is concerned," the NOW statement said. "What woman would ever believe that she could receive fair treatment from him?"

"No woman, including women attorneys, should ever have to appear before him for any reason," the statement continued. "Resignation is his only viable alternative."

"Rape is a violent crime, a terrible crime, and here is a judge calling it a normal reaction. His remarks would be unacceptable in Pine Top, North Carolina. We certainly don't have to put up with them in Madison, Wisconsin."

Pam Pierson, coordinator of the Madison NOW chapter, said the organization had no complaint with Simonson's decision itself, just his attitudes toward sex and women.

"He is certainly being unfair, not just to women, but to men as well," Pierson said. "It is an insult to men for the reason that it assumes rapes are normal behavior for men, and it is an affront to women."

"It would be very difficult to have a fair trial in a rape case before a judge who holds those attitudes," she concluded.

Assistant District Attorney Meryl Manhardt, who handled the prosecution in the rape case Wednesday, said Simonson's remarks about clothing were "particularly sexist" and expressed concern that he was expressing "the general male philosophy that the way a woman dresses provokes a sexual attack."

The 15-year-old was one of three juveniles accused of raping a West High School student in a stairwell at the school. A 14-year-old boy involved in the case was sentenced earlier by Simonson to a year in a Milwaukee group home. The third boy was not prosecuted after he promised to testify against the other two. However, the case never came to trial because the other two admitted their guilt.

During the attack, the 16-year-old screamed for help, but her cries could not be heard because the West High band was in the middle of rehearsal in a nearby room.

Simonson said that his decision on the 15-year-old was influenced by what he termed the youth's strong family and church ties.

The boys received differing sentences because of "different involvement and different backgrounds," said the judge.

He said all three boys came from broken homes.